# WebBuyer

SITE REVIEWS

## SITE REVIEWS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

COMPILED BY KEVIN SAVETZ AND ABIGAIL CRANE

### PC SHOPPING SITES

The sites in this listing sell products from multiple manufacturers. See the sites under "PC Direct Vendors," or check the *Computer Shopper* Source Directory ***(cgi.zdnet.com/slink?8145)***, for more information on PC manufacturers offering only their own brands (such as Dell and Gateway).

### aberdeeninc.com

👍 volume pricing • smooth navigation • easy ordering
👎 limited software selection

Built for the savvy consumer who craves technical information, **Aberdeen** offers extensive specs on a wide variety of computers and accessories.

### accessmicro.com

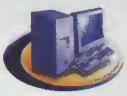
👍 smooth navigation • easy ordering

Shoppers will enjoy the selection at **Access Micro,** which offers 45,000 items ranging from memory to T1 routers. The help desk and hardware guide provide aid to first-time visitors.

### www.applied-computer.com

👍 smooth navigation
👎 handling fee on orders under $200

Selling PCs and supplies since 1984, **Applied Computer** promises to match or beat any advertised price. The company stocks 800,000 products—check the site's list of the 1,000 most popular ones.



### blackbox.com

👍 smooth navigation

Specializing in cabling and network-connectivity products, **Black Box's** extensive 900-page catalog of storage, LAN, switch, surge-protection, and other accessories can be viewed online or off.

### buy.com

Best Site winner this month. See below.

### cablestogo.com

👍 hard-to-find tools and test equipment
👎 $30 minimum order requirement

**Cables To Go** sells every conceivable cable, cord, or wire your PC might need, from standard SCSI to esoteric system-specific cables. You'll also find networking products and all sorts of adapters.

### cdw.com

👍 list of rebates and coupons • business leasing options available • smooth navigation • easy ordering

**CDW** offers an impressive array of hardware and software. The comparison tool lets shoppers create side-by-side comparisons in many product categories.

### compuplus.com

👍 easy ordering • good return policy

**Comp-U-Plus** highlights its customer service, offering a 30-day money-back guarantee and free technical support. Its catalog isn't the biggest, but plenty of name brands are represented, and prices are reasonable.

### compusa.com

👍 smooth navigation • easy ordering

**CompUSA** is a well-organized site offering a fair amount of PC hardware, accessories, and software, with electronics and video-game gadgets rounding out the selection. Don't overlook the site's clearance section.

### computability.com

👍 handy side-by-side product-comparison tool • smooth navigation • easy ordering

Beginning its mail-order business in 1982, **ComputAbility** has aged considerably better than the Commodore 64 you bought that year. The site offers desktop, notebook, and handheld computers, plus peripherals and software.

### computercomputer.com

👍 easy ordering

Interested in buying components and piecing together your own PC? **Computercomputer.com** sells barebones systems that'll make a good starting point.

### computers4sure.com

Best Site winner this month. See p. 202.

### computershopper.com

👍 smooth navigation

*Computer Shopper*'s own computer-buying site, **computershopper.com,** provides access to product reviews, interactive guides on choosing a desktop or a notebook, and How to Buy sections on the most popular product categories.

## buy.com

Computer Shopper Best Site Award September 2000

Point and click your way through this monstrous, multifaceted site, and you'll find anything and everything from computers and software to electronics, books, movies, music, and video games. **Buy.com** sells 850,000 items in its U.S. store. In addition to this branch, it runs local sites for the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

Despite the site's mind-blowing selection, shopping is fast and efficient. If you're a first-time buyer, the Passport Express Purchase feature may make it possible to make your purchase without typing your address, if you already have an account with Hotmail or MSN.

Our order arrived two days after it was placed, and the site's informative e-mail messages and online order tracking kept us informed every step of the way. Round-the-clock customer service is available by e-mail or a toll-free phone call. The return policy is quite fair: You won't get stuck paying a restocking fee if you simply change your mind.

If you find a lower price at another Internet store within 24 hours of placing your order, Buy.com will match it. Shipping costs are reasonable and clearly spelled out; for an even better deal, check out the Free Shipping Store link.

| BUY.COM |
| --- |
| **Main focus:** Computers, software, consumer electronics |
| **Additional categories:** Books, movies, video games, music, golf |
| **Number of products offered:** 850,000 |
| **Areas of development:** Growing selection of downloadable commercial software; License Online program provides quick means for acquiring software licenses. |

SITE REVIEWS

## computersurplusoutlet.com

consignment service

Frugal shoppers and do-it-yourselfers will feel at home at **Computer Surplus Outlet,** a computer hardware liquidator. The company sells closeouts, overstocks, refurbished equipment, and liquidation items at bargain-basement prices. You can find complete, assembly-required Pentium systems for less than $100.

## cqk.com

smooth navigation

Designed for folks who know what they want, **Computer Quick** offers plain-box, best-buy, and closeout merchandise in addition to a selection of more than 90,000 items in regular stock.

## cyberrebate.com

"100% Off" tab shows 300 products whose rebates equal their cost. • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

rebates take 10 to 14 weeks to process

**CyberRebate.com** only sells products that come with money-back rebates. There is a small selection of computer accessories and software. In addition, the site offers electronics, office supplies, toys, and kitchen items

## cyberwarehouse.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

may take up to three days to ship

If you're the kind of shopper who can't pass up a bargain-basement sale or an outlet mall, this site may be for you. **CyberWarehouse** offers PCs, monitors, printers, and other peripherals.

## dalco.com

international and APO/FPO orders • smooth navigation

**Dalco** stocks everything from motherboards to monitors. Bargain hunters will want to start with this site's specials, which are shown on the home page and change regularly.

## www.damark.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Damark** offers a variety of PCs and notebooks, as well as accessories, digital cameras, and home electronics. Factory-serviced items are available, and the outlet area delivers low prices on items in short supply.

## direct411.com

easy ordering

**Direct411** offers an impressive selection of 50,000 in-stock hardware and software products. The catalog includes servers, memory upgrades, storage devices, digital cameras, and software.

## dirtcheapdrives.com

detailed archive of technical-support information • quantity discounts available • smooth navigation • easy ordering

If you can store data on it, this site sells it. **Dirt Cheap Drives** offers deals on hard drives, CD-ROM and DVD hardware, drive arrays, and hard-to-find laptop storage. This 10-year-old company also stocks mounting kits, media, and other accessories.

## ebworld.com

can search for age-appropriate games • lists release dates for new game titles • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Electronics Boutique** is a gamer's paradise. Here you'll find game software and add-ons for your PC and your Mac, as well as titles for Dreamcast, Nintendo 64, and other game consoles. Check out the new releases, best-sellers, and gaming news.

## ecost.com

same-day shipment on most orders • photos and warranty details for most products • smooth navigation • easy ordering

The **eCost.com** catalog spans the full realm of PC hardware and software, including ready-to-use systems, peripherals, accessories, software, and games. Featured specials in each category point shoppers to the best deals, and fastidiously organized subcategories help them find the exact products they need.

## egghead.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Egghead.com** shoppers can browse the hardware, software, and electronics superstores, or check out the deals on surplus computer merchandise. In addition, the site also sells home electronics, sports and fitness merchandise, and travel packages.

## electrified.com

30-day guarantee on all items • se habla español • good return policy

Looking for deep discounts on older laptops, notebooks, monitors, and printers? **Electrified** specializes in products that are discontinued, second-inventory, refurbished, off-lease, or otherwise not state-of-the-art. Systems range from new Pentium II laptops to under-$200 used 486s.

## elinux.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

The **eLinux.com** site offers hardware and software for users of the Linux operating system. Desktop and notebook systems for sale here have been tested with Linux and don't come bundled with that "other" OS.

## firstsource.com

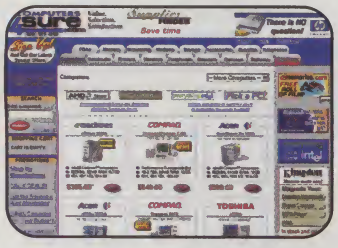
real-time online customer service • smooth navigation • easy ordering

Focused on the technology needs of businesses, **Firstsource** offers a broad range of choices in computer hardware, rack-mount systems, network tools, phone systems, wiring, and business software.

## computers4sure.com

COMPUTER SHOPPER Best Site Award September 2000

The 15 well-stocked departments at **Computers4Sure.com** offer a breadth of products, including networking equipment, peripherals, PDAs, and scanners. The selection spans 60,000 products, and the tabbed interface makes it easy to find the right category. The PC selection includes prebuilt machines, servers, and notebooks, as well as Apple products and barebones kits.



Fast and intuitive, the site delivers handy features for choosy shoppers. The Laptop Comparison page includes a helpful price/performance comparison chart, and the Digital Camera Focus page offers useful buying tips for photographers. Bargain hunters can quickly sniff out deals on the Rebates and Special Offers page. The Clearance area features specials on discontinued, refurbished, and repackaged products.

A powerful search function lets shoppers look for a favorite manufacturer or items within a particular price range, and highlights low-price and in-stock items.

The EZ Order Tracking tool provides instant updates on your order's status and can generate printable receipts. In addition, informative e-mail messages keep you abreast of shipment status. The company's liberal return policy is restocking fee-free.

| COMPUTERS4SURE.COM |
|---|
| **Main focus:** Computer hardware and accessories |
| **Additional categories:** Software, telephones |
| **Number of products offered:** 60,000 |
| **Areas of development:** Expanding customer-service and sales staff |

SITE REVIEWS

## gogocity.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

You'll get beyond **GoGoCity.com's** funny name when you see its excellent selection of computer hardware. You'll find desktop and notebook computers, peripherals, software, and PC accessories of all types. Detailed product information, often with pictures, rounds out the catalog.

## insight.com

separate sites for the U.S., Canada, Germany, and the U.K. • smooth navigation • easy ordering

With more than 100,000 items, **Insight** offers an impressive and easy-to-navigate catalog of hardware and software products. More than 100 free newsletters feature new-product news, closeout specials, and tech news.

## www.jandr.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

Whether you're shopping for an Aptiva or an iMac, hardware and accessories abound at **J&R Computer World,** making this a one-stop shop for many. You'll also find a huge selection of digital and traditional film cameras.

## laptoptravel.com

smooth navigation

**Laptop Travel** sells portable-computing and international travel gear, including electrical adapters, modem converters and couplers, and security accessories. You'll find traditional and "camouflaged" laptop carrying cases, laptop RAM, and storage add-ons.

## thelinuxstore.com

smooth navigation

If your PC is "penguin-powered," **The Linux Store** might be your place to shop. The site offers a small selection of hardware and software that's compatible with the popular alternative operating system. The community area offers Linux news, free downloads, and Web links.

## mcglen.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**McGlen Micro's** specialized searches can help you find memory and other accessories compatible with your computer, printer, and copier. Shoppers can design a custom system to be built and shipped in two days.

## megahaus.com

lifetime technical support on all products • CD-mastering and other utility software • smooth navigation

**MegaHaus** calls itself "the drive authority." It offers a wide variety of storage solutions, including hard drives, DVD drives, RAID, and removable storage. A technical-information area features FAQs and specifications on hardware ranging from DVD players to drive brackets.

## mei-microcenter.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

**MEI-Micro Center** offers new and refurbished desktops from Compaq, eMachines, Hewlett Packard, and PowerSpec. There's also a small selection of peripherals. Rummage around the bargain bin for deals on closeouts, refurbished units, and overstocks.

## memman.com

all memory carries a lifetime warranty • smooth navigation • good return policy

When it's time to upgrade the memory in your desktop or laptop, don't forget **Memory Man.** Besides memory chips, the site sells processors, motherboards, hard drives, heat sinks, and batteries for many types of notebooks.

## memory4less.com

company tests all products shipped • smooth navigation

**Memory4Less** offers low prices on a wide variety of RAM, including older, hard-to-find types. If you don't know the memory requirements of your computer or digital camera, it will tell you. The site also sells CPUs, motherboards, and laptop hard drives.

## microx-press.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**MicroX-Press** offers detailed information about most products, as well as a handy "E-mail me when this product is priced at…" feature and a configuration tool. Customers are invited to rate and review products they've tried.

## mobileplanet.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

Offering gadgets for mobile professionals, **MobilePlanet** is home to a gaggle of high-tech tools and toys. The selection includes handheld and notebook computers, PDAs, wireless communication products, and travel-size printers and scanners—plus countless accessories for each.

## motherboards.com

With a wide selection of motherboards from nine manufacturers, do-it-yourselfers can pick the perfect innards for their new PCs at **Motherboards.com.** This Web store offers CPUs, memory, graphics cards, drives, and other internal essentials.

## www.mwave.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Multiwave Direct's** friendly site sells a multitude of hardware and software products. In addition to PC systems and peripherals, this Web store stocks notebook accessories, videoconferencing equipment, and network tools.

## www.necx.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

$25 surcharge for phone orders

**NECX** offers all manner of hardware, accessories, and software. The Showcases section highlights products in specialty categories, such as PDAs or USB peripherals. The How to Buy guides offer impartial advice on selecting and installing common PC add-ons.

## neutronet.com

purchases earn credit points toward your next order • smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Neutron Computers** carries thousands of computer systems and peripherals from nearly 400 different manufacturers and distributors. The site's handy toolbox offers easy access to best buys, help for first-time buyers, and a massive manufacturer directory.

## www.notebooksuperstore.com

devoted exclusively to portable computers • easy ordering

**Notebook Superstore** sells more than 90 different laptop models from eight manufacturers. You'll see technical details about each model, and a comparison tool helps you zero in on the best portable for your needs. Corporate accounts receive lease options and volume discounts.

## 123cdc.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Computer Discount Center** offers a wide variety of PC add-ons, including storage, digital cameras, and displays. Shoppers will find competitive prices and detailed product information.

## officedepot.com

free next-day delivery on orders of more than $50 within local trading areas • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Office Depot** sells everything for the office: files to filing cabinets, briefcases to bookcases. The site's computer category offers a selection of prebuilt machines from major manufacturers. Office Depot provides free downloadable business forms, letter templates, and spreadsheet templates.

## www.officemax.com

free next-day delivery on orders of more than $50 • low-price guarantee • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

A few clicks at **OfficeMax** can transform a bare room into a fully furnished office. You'll find computers, other business *machines, office furniture,* and even paper and pencils under this virtual roof.

# SITE REVIEWS

## onvia.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Onvia.com** offers a rich variety of products, including hardware, software, telephone systems, office furniture, and office products. Shoppers can ask a product specialist questions at the help forum or search previous postings.

## outpost.com

free overnight delivery on all items • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Outpost.com** is a lush home to hardware, accessories, and software. Visit the Game Outpost to get your playtime fix, or bid against other shoppers for hardware in the OutpostAuctions area. Get gift ideas for every person and budget in the Gift Ideas section.

## www.palmgear.com

mailing lists offer news, specials, and user tips • smooth navigation

Palm-device users will appreciate the extensive selection of free and commercial downloadable programs at **PalmGear H.Q.** The site features lists of the newest Palm programs, as well as essential software picks. Shoppers can buy handheld hardware and accessories, including carrying cases and styli.

## www.thepartsfinder.com

smooth navigation
minimum $75 order

A friendly site that uses a graphical interface to simplify finding CPU fans, power supplies, cables, and screws, **The Parts Finder** is targeted at computer hobbyists and corporate buyers. Even the most mundane parts, such as bezels, fans, and batteries, are listed.

## pcconnection.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

In business for more than 15 years, **PC Connection** offers good deals on a colossal variety of products. Smart Selectors ease the searching process for shoppers looking for systems, cameras, printers, monitors, or memory to fit specific guidelines.

## pcmall.com

free lifetime technical support • smooth navigation • easy ordering

Many folks are familiar with **PC Mall's** thick, colorful catalog, and the online version is just as dense. PC Mall has a vast selection of computers, hardware, and software.

## pcprogress.com

smooth navigation

If you're in the market for PC components and peripherals, check out **PC Progress.** The site specializes in cost-effective memory, with a lifetime warranty. You'll find a large selection of memory, including notebook, iMac, and printer RAM.

## pcstop.com

This purveyor of hardware and software offers 50,000 computer-related products from 1,300 manufacturers. **PC Stop's** unusual interface makes shoppers start with a search—you can't just browse.

## pcwonders.com

corporate and educational accounts available • smooth navigation • easy ordering

At **pcWonders.com,** you'll find more than 90,000 hardware and software products. Additional categories include car audio, home electronics, PDAs, and bargain blowouts.

## pczone.com

printable rebate coupons • smooth navigation • easy ordering
handling fee on smaller orders

**PC Zone** boasts an impressive product selection of all things PC-related, including desktops, notebooks, printers, monitors, storage devices, CPU upgrades, and network equipment—plus PDAs, digital cameras, and handheld MP3 players. You'll also find links to a clearance area and other stores: **Mac Zone** and **Zones Business Solutions.**

## provantage.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Provantage** offers PC products from more than 1,000 manufacturers. The selection includes software, hardware, books, and training materials. The site's Personal Tracking List feature lets customers build a list of product bookmarks, then monitor the products' prices and availability.

## www.qualityclick.com

leasing options • easy ordering • good return policy

The **Quality Click** Web store covers all the basics for the PC user, including hardware, networking supplies, accessories, and software. Technical support is available through a toll-free phone number, fax, or e-mail, and sales support by live chat.

## shopper.cnet.com

The **CNET Shopper** search engine takes the guesswork out of finding a deal on hardware, software, and accessories. The site tracks the prices of more than 200,000 products in 100 stores.

## shoppingplanet.com

smooth navigation

Do-it-yourselfers will appreciate **Shopping Planet's** inventory of barebones systems, add-on cards, and kits. An arm of the site that specializes in software and hardware for the Linux operating system is available at ***shoppingplanet.com/cm/linux.asp.***

## www.sparco.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Sparco's** catalog of more than 130,000 products makes it simple to shop for computer equipment. Looking for that something extra? Check out the list of products that come bundled with "free stuff."

## www.spidergear.com

**Spider Gear** offers new and refurbished computers, cameras, home audio and video products, car-audio items, and appliances. A $10 optional membership entitles you to reduced prices, an annual rebate, and advance notice of new products.

## www.ssdonline.com

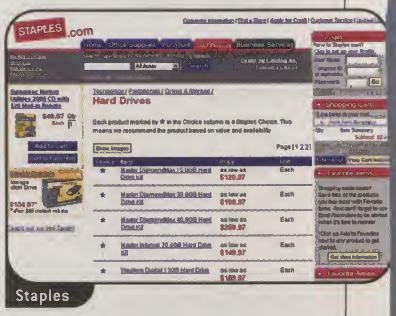
the E-list service stores your product preferences • smooth navigation

At **State Street Direct's** Web store, shoppers will discover a huge selection of consumer electronics in addition to computers and imaging products. Digital photographers will find many items of interest.

## staples.com

peruse your history of past purchases, even months later • liberal price-matching policy • smooth navigation • good return policy

Even if a **Staples** store is just down the block, you might prefer this elegant Web site when shopping for computer accessories, software, and office supplies. If you order similar items often, you can set up personalized lists to avoid filling out a new form every time.




## 2for1inkjet.com

free shipping on orders of six or more items, or at least $200 • smooth navigation • good return policy

If your printer is putting you in the poorhouse, pay a visit to **2 For 1 Inkjet,** where you'll find two-for-one supplies for every brand of inkjet and laser printer, copier, and fax machine.

## 3re.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

# SITE REVIEWS

Specializing in used computers and rebuilt electronic equipment, **3Re.com** takes open-box returns from original equipment manufacturers, and repairs and repackages the machines. Offerings include desktops, notebooks, printers, monitors, network equipment, and software.

## tccomputers.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

In business since 1988, **TC Computers** sells fully configured systems, motherboards, and name-brand peripherals. The company's specialty is motherboards—it tests each one prior to shipping and bundles a step-by-step installation video.

## tcwo.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

**Thompson's Computer Warehouse Outlet Center** offers "wholesale computer parts to the public." The selection is small—you may find only a dozen monitors or four CD-ROM drives—but the prices are fantastic. Browse the selection or print out a complete price sheet for easy reference.

## techstore.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**TechStore** offers hardware in dozens of categories, ranging from CPU upgrades to storage devices. The site also offers a wide range of software—everything from Microsoft applications to children's titles.

## tigerdirect.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**TigerDirect's** site offers custom-built computers, tested and shipped within 48 hours. Shoppers in the mood for an adventure can order a build-it-yourself custom PC kit.

## trudata.com

library of useful free software downloads • smooth navigation

**True Data Technology's** selection spans desktops, laptops, and palmtops, with an exceptional catalog of motherboards, hard drives, and other upgrade accessories. The site also features communication essentials for businesses, including DSL equipment and telephony products.

## www.usbstuff.com

Looking for gadgets to plug into your new Universal Serial Bus-equipped computer? **USB Stuff** has it all, including digital cameras, CD-RW drives, printers, modems, hubs, input devices, cables, and adapters. A sister site at ***www.firewirestuff.com*** stocks IEEE 1394/FireWire-compatible hardware.

## usedcomputer.com

index of nonprofit organizations accepting computer donations

**Used Computer Mall** is a marketplace for used computer equipment. Shoppers can list hardware to sell or look for items to buy using the free classified ads. The site can also help you appraise equipment.

## warehouse.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

The five "warehouses" under **MicroWarehouse's** roof sell PC hardware and software, Mac products, networking components, and supplies. The site provides corporate, educational, and government accounts. Business leases are available.

# PC DIRECT VENDORS

## aventec.com

cancel an order before it is shipped and incur a $100 fee

**Aventec** offers preconfigured AMD- and Intel-based desktop systems. For do-it-yourselfers, the site sells the parts to build your own PC, including cases, accessory cards, and a wide variety of motherboards. Check out the Basement for clearance items.

## axissys.com

easy ordering • good return policy

The **Axis Systems** Web store offers a best-price guarantee on its preconfigured notebooks, servers, desktops, and workstations.

## buyabs.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

Offering exceptional customer support on quality desktop and notebook systems is the goal at **ABS.** Shoppers can custom-configure a wide variety of PCs.

## buy-atlas.com

good return policy

The **Atlas Micro** site sells a variety of preconfigured desktop PCs. Buyers can select from computers built around Pentium II and III, Celeron, Cyrix, and AMD processors.

## cybermaxpc.com

downloadable drivers and online tech guide • smooth navigation

**CyberMax** offers AMD- and Intel-based systems in a wide variety of configurations to suit almost every need. The choices range from speedy desktop machines for gamers to light laptops for business travelers.

## www.cyberpowerpc.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

From the DVD Dream to the Lightning Professional, the computers at **Cyberpower** have names as good as their warranties—three years, with a 30-day money-back guarantee.

## dell.com

Best Site winner this month. See below.

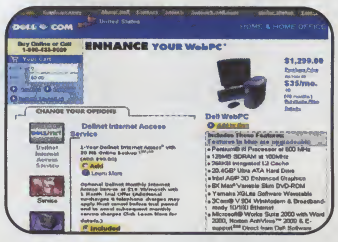
## www.directplus.compaq.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

## dell.com

Computer Shopper Best Site Award September 2000

Carrying the online banner for one of the largest names in direct PC sales, **Dell's** Web store upholds the company's stellar reputation. The site specializes in built-to-order desktop and notebook PCs, offering detailed specs, an online tour of each product, and copious customization options. This diverse site offers something for every PC shopper: computer auctions, a factory outlet for refurbished machines, and, in the Gigabuys arm, new peripherals and accessories.




Ordering from the site is fast and efficient, whether you're a first-time buyer or a returning customer. We received a confirmation e-mail just minutes after placing an order, complete with an estimated ship date and online and offline customer-service contact information.

Dell's Total Satisfaction Return Policy ensures buyer satisfaction. If you need help, the site provides extensive technical support customized for your particular system and personal understanding of PCs. When you need help from a live person, support is available by phone, Web message boards, and e-mail.

| DELL COMPUTER CORP. |
|---|
| **Main focus:** Custom-built desktops and notebook PCs |
| **Additional categories:** Peripherals, software, auctions |
| **Number of products offered:** Seven desktop, server, and notebook product lines; 30,000 software products and peripherals |
| **Areas of development:** Customized customer-support Web sites |

**Compaq DirectPlus** carries desktops, portables, workstations, and servers. The Compaq Factory Outlet at ***www.compaqworks.com*** offers discounts on refurbished and new overstocked merchandise.

## e4me.com

smooth navigation

With PCs starting at $399, **eMachines** has found its niche in low-cost desktop and laptop computers. The site offers optional add-ons for your system, including a three-year extended service warranty, Internet access, and two sizes of monitors.

## fpcdirect.fujitsu-pc.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

Purchase **Fujitsu** notebook computers from the source. This Web site offers personal, business, and multimedia notebook computers, with several warranty options on each. Check the Refurbished Outlet for deals.

## www.gateway.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

One of the biggest names in online computer sales, **Gateway** serves small businesses, corporations, educational institutions, government bodies, and home users. Its site sells desktops, portables, and a complete line of accessories.

## ibm.com/shop

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

Once synonymous with the phrase "personal computer," **IBM** still pushes the envelope. Its site offers business and home computers, notebooks, servers, thin clients, and the networking equipment to hook them all together.

## SITE REVIEWS

## kaypro.com

smooth navigation

**Kaypro's** first computer, released in the early '80s, used a Z-80 processor and ran the long-forgotten CP/M operating system. Today, the company's Web site sells decidedly more modern desktop computers, allowing shoppers to custom-configure Pentium III systems.

## micronpc.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

One of the largest direct PC vendors, **micronpc.com** has a Web sales site broken into clear areas to suit many types of customers, including home-office users, large businesses, government buyers, and buyers outside the United States.

## nutrend.com

smooth navigation

Custom-configure a home or business PC at **NuTrend.** The company offers a wide selection of desktop machines running your choice of Intel or AMD processors. Each system comes with a three-year warranty.

## www.quantex.com

smooth navigation

Desktops, notebooks, servers, workstations, and peripherals—all are offered at **Quantex's** Web store. Shoppers who need assistance can get instant help using the site's live customer-service chat system. A community area allows Quantex PC users to keep in touch.

## www.sagernotebook.com

leasing options available • smooth navigation • good return policy

Specializing in portable computers, **Sager** offers its customers a variety of options, from budget-minded machines to speedy multimedia units. The one-year warranty includes a 72-hour repair-turnaround guarantee.

## www.shopacer.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

Notebooks, desktops, and accessories are for sale at **Acer's** site, in addition to ready-to-use PC bundles for home, business, and education. Reconditioned systems are available at the Acer Outlet.

## shopprostar.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

Each computer in **ProStar's** line of notebook PCs is backed by a 30-day money-back guarantee, a speedy repair promise, and free tech support.

## store.apple.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Apple's** easy-to-use online store allows buyers to custom-configure the company's Power Mac G4, PowerBook, iMac, and iBook computers. A wide array of Mac-compatible software and accessories is also available.

## vaiodirect.sel.sony.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

**VAIO Direct** sells Sony's line of desktops, notebooks, digital cameras, displays, and storage devices. The Xtras Direct arm offers add-ons for PCs, digital cameras, and other equipment.

## www.winbook.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

Focusing exclusively on notebook computers, **WinBook** offers machines with a 30-day money-back guarantee, a one-year warranty, and free technical support.

## INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS

## www.att.net

**AT&T WorldNet** offers 450 local access numbers. The standard pricing plan is $19.95 per month for 150 hours of access. For $2 more, power users can get unlimited access. Families and Websmiths will appreciate the whopping 60MB of Web-page space and six e-mail addresses.

## compuserve.com

Owned by America Online, **CompuServe** is aimed at professionals and is more powerful than AOL. Access is $9.95 per month for 20 hours, or $19.95 for unlimited access. Customers get seven e-mail addresses and 5MB of Web-page space.

## csg.sprint.com/internet

Unlimited access to **Sprint Earthlink** costs $19.95 a month ($2 less if you are a Sprint long-distance customer). The service provides 6MB of Web-page space and an impressive 1,400 local access phone numbers nationwide.

## free.msn.com

no access to Usenet newsgroups

Displaying a recently revamped interface, **MSN Internet Access** costs $21.95 per month for unlimited access, and the first month is free. You'll also find more than 800 U.S. and international access numbers. The service is not available for Mac users. MSN provides 12MB for Web pages.

## www.mciworld.com

**MCI WorldCom** offers more than 750 local access numbers across the United States. It costs $19.95 for up to 150 hours of access each month ($3 less if you are an MCI long-distance customer). Additional online time is 99 cents an hour.

## www.newaol.com

Known for its ease of use, **America Online** is the nation's most popular ISP. It offers many pricing plans, including one for $21.95 per month that gives unlimited access. Extras include members-only forums, 14MB of Web-page space, and seven e-mailboxes.

## prodigy.com

A $19.95 monthly fee buys unlimited access to **Prodigy Internet.** Low-usage and deluxe-access plans are also available. Users get 6MB of Web-page space. Accounts come with only one e-mail address, but you can add 10 additional ones for $2 extra.

SECTION CONTINUES ON PAGE 214

## PC RESOURCES

### cablemodeminfo.com

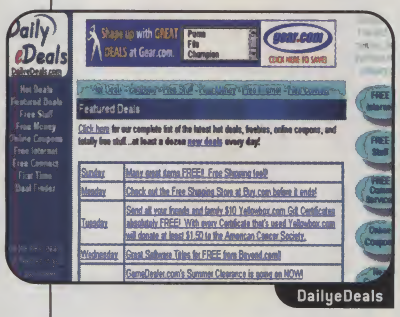
helps you find a cable-ready ISP

Internet addicts considering upgrading to a cable modem—as well as users who have already made the jump—will find a cornucopia of information at **Cablemodeminfo.com.** You'll find reviews of cable-modem hardware and tips on sharing a modem between PCs.

### dailyedeals.com

smooth navigation

Before you place an order at your favorite e-commerce site, open a window to **DailyeDeals.** Its coupon pages offer coupon codes that will instantly shave $5 to $20 off the bottom line at major online retailers. The First Time area links to sites that offer substantial discounts to first-time customers.



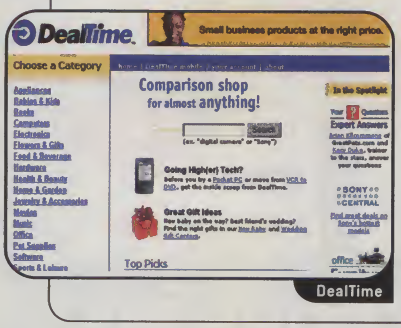

### dcresource.com

message board • links to digital-camera stores

The **Digital Camera Resource Page** is an unbiased, comprehensive source of information for digital-camera buyers and owners. Shoppers will enjoy the FAQ page, buyer's guide, and reviews.

### dealtime.com

DealTime Mobile service lets you compare prices from a cell phone or Palm device • smooth navigation




**DealTime** is an independent comparison-shopping service that helps you decide where to buy online. The site aggregates prices from hundreds of merchants, auctions, and classified sites.

### expertcity.com

smooth navigation
currently no support for Mac or Unix operating systems

**Expertcity** promises live, 24-hour computer assistance from real human beings. When you pose a question, experts across the Internet bid for your business. Read their profiles, compare prices, then choose the expert you like.

### 56k.com

downloads of the latest modem firmware • smooth navigation

Don't buy a new modem until you've visited **56K Modem Central.** Start with the primer on 56Kbps modems, learn the difference between technologies, then use the price shopper to find a model at the best price.

### www.ftc.gov

smooth navigation

The **Federal Trade Commission's** Web site is packed with useful information for consumers. The content covers the spectrum of consumer fraud and how to avoid it—online and offline. Articles address online auctions and protecting yourself when shopping on the Net.

### gomez.com

smooth navigation

**Gomez.com** offers ratings and customer reviews of e-commerce sites in two dozen categories, ranging from Web-based computer stores to drugstores, apparel shopping to online brokers. Read other customers' reviews and check their ratings on ease of use, customer confidence, and cost.

### help-site.com

links to 1,000 documents • smooth navigation

**Help-Site** is a great place to find FAQ lists, tutorials, manuals, and official as well as unofficial support. You'll find documentation on DOS, Windows, OS/2, and even Unix and VAX/VMS systems.

## SITE REVIEWS

### helptalk.com

smooth navigation

**Helptalk** offers free assistance for most Windows software and hardware. The site offers 30 message boards where you can ask questions about applications, operating systems, and programming.

### modemhelp.com

smooth navigation

**ModemHelp** provides technical support for modem users and a hearty list of links to other modem-related sites. You'll find information on upgrading modems, tools for diagnosing problems, tutorials, and discussion forums.

### nextag.com

product reviews available • smooth navigation

**NexTag** is a sophisticated buying service that can help frugal shoppers find the lowest possible prices on computer equipment, electronics, books, music, and videos. Entering your ZIP code allows NexTag to calculate shipping and tax for accurate pricing.

### productreviewnet.com

smooth navigation

**Product ReviewNet** collects abstracts of all sorts of products, including computers, appliances, sports equipment, and automobiles. Each abstract includes a citation (for magazine articles) or a link (for online reviews). The site includes a handy list of online buying guides.

### www.thepubliceye.com

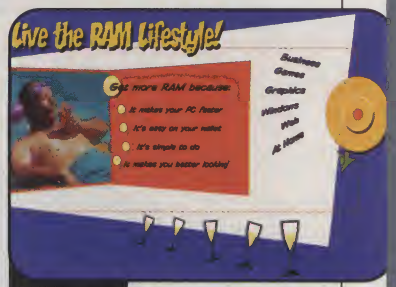
customer-satisfaction database • smooth navigation

Find Internet businesses that deliver the best service—and avoid the ones that don't—with **ePublicEye.com,** a customer-service rating site. The site uses secret shoppers who patronize Internet businesses, conducting audits and rating the service of each business.

### rammatters.com

Flash 4 plug-in required for maximum effects

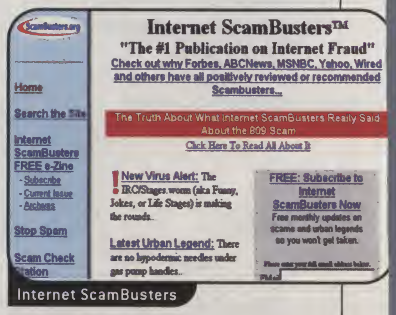
**RAM Matters** humorously explains how adding memory to your computer will make you more productive, and, so the site claims, better-looking. You'll get help in determining the type of memory your computer requires, plus installation tips.




### www.scambusters.com

information on viruses—real and fake

**Internet ScamBusters** is a site and a newsletter aiming to help Net users avoid getting cheated. Each newsletter focuses on a single type of scam, ranging from the merely annoying to the downright dangerous. Scams that target online shoppers are also covered.




### usb.org

message board fields questions • smooth navigation

Check this site for technical information about the **Universal Serial Bus,** as well as answers to frequently asked questions and information about devices that use the bus. There's information for end users as well as developers.

## windrivers.com

smooth navigation

**WinDrivers.com** is a comprehensive archive of drivers and DLL files for hard drives, sound cards, scanners, and other hardware. The site also provides links to antivirus updates and BIOS upgrades.

## www.worldowindows.com

hundreds of downloadable drivers • smooth navigation

**World O' Windows** is a collection of useful news, resources, and tips about current and future versions of Microsoft Windows. Information and user tips abound. The site can be invaluable if you're considering upgrading or if your recent upgrade is causing problems.

# SITE REVIEWS

## SOFTWARE SITES

## accountingshop.com

get credit for your old QuickBooks or Peachtree software when you upgrade • smooth navigation

The **Accounting Shop** Web store focuses entirely on accounting software. Shoppers can choose from an extensive catalog of high-end, midrange, and small-business packages, including AccuBooks, Business Works, MAS 90, and Peachtree. Easy-to-understand charts let you compare products by type, function, or price.

## beyond.com

Best Site winner this month. See below.

## buycheapsoftware.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

The name says it all: Here you can **Buy Cheap Software.** This site offers a relatively small selection—about 300 titles—but it does sell popular programs from well-known publishers, including Adobe, Corel, Lotus, and Microsoft.

## buyonet.com

site available in six languages • software available in 20 languages • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Buyonet** specializes in downloadable commercial software. Hundreds of business applications, utilities, and games are available for download. For a nominal fee, shoppers can order a CD backup of purchased software.

## chumbo.com

special orders accepted • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Chumbo.com's** impressive selection includes traditional boxed software and downloadable titles. Shoppers can preorder software for shipment the day it is released, or peruse the selection of DVD movies.

## cws.internet.com

free e-mail summary of software updates • smooth navigation

**Stroud's Consummate Winsock Applications List** is the ultimate one-stop download site for the latest and greatest in Internet software. Find and download Web development tools, browsers, and chat clients. You'll find comprehensive file lists, ratings, and extensive reviews.

## dealdealdeal.com

smooth navigation

**Dealdealdeal** offers office suites, utility software, graphics programs, operating systems, games, and edutainment software. Although the selection isn't massive, shoppers will find a nice mix of new software and older titles—handy, whether you're looking for Microsoft Office 2000 or Office 97.

## download.com

smooth navigation

When you're looking for shareware or free software, **Download.com** is a fine starting point. Well-written newsletters and down-to-earth reviews will help you find the perfect programs. The site links to tens of thousands of files of PC, Mac, Linux, Windows CE, and Palm software.

## freewarefiles.com

smooth navigation

Windows users who want great software without having to spend any money can start at **Freeware Files.** This Web site offers links to gratis business applications, screen savers, games, and many other types of software. It features quick links to the most popular giveaways.

## gamedealer.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**GameDealer.com** offers software for a multitude of video-game consoles. You can browse by platform or seek out the type of game you prefer, such as sports simulations or family games. Check out the new releases, or preorder from the list of upcoming titles.

## beyond.com

**Beyond.com** specializes in software, presenting a cornupia of choices for PC, Mac, and PDA users. You'll enjoy extensive details about each program's features and system requirements, plus ratings from customers who have bought the program. (The site generates these ratings by sending e-mail surveys to customers two weeks after they buy a product.)

In addition to a trove of traditional boxed titles, the site sells downloadable software from publishers such as Intuit, Macromedia, and Symantec. Via a special download manager, shoppers can pay for and install Windows software in minutes. Although Beyond.com's main focus is software, the site also offers a respectable selection of computer hardware, including digital cameras, PDAs, and storage devices.

Other perks include online order tracking, informative buyer's guides, and special pages for buyers in federal and state government agencies. Specialized product centers offer grouped product offerings such as $9.99 children's software, MP3 tools, and Linux products. Plus, Beyond.com will build a customized list of software recommendations based on your interests, operating system, and budget. Customer service is available via e-mail or a toll-free phone call.

| BEYOND.COM |
|---|
| **Main focus:** Boxed and downloadable software |
| **Additional categories:** Hardware, games, handhelds |
| **Number of products offered:** 164,000 products, plus 13,000 downloadable titles |
| **Areas of development:** Recently added Pocket PC store for software, peripherals, and accessories; improved online software-distribution system |

SECTION CONTINUES ON PAGE 220

## SITE REVIEWS

### jumbo.com

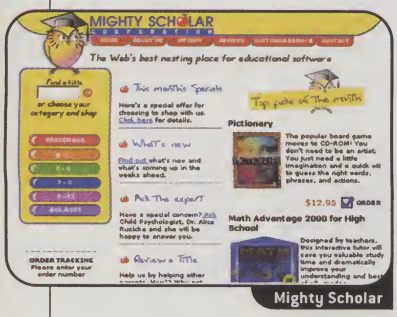
smooth navigation

**Jumbo** is the perfect name for this monstrous file archive. In addition to programs for sale, you'll find thousands of commercial-application demos, along with loads of shareware and free software.

### mightyscholar.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

It can be hard to find educational software that's right for your children's ages and learning needs. **Mighty Scholar** sells handpicked educational software, categorized by age range and subject.




### 999central.com

buy seven programs, get one free • smooth navigation • good return policy

The **999central.com** site offers 500 programs, each for $9.99. Shoppers can find a wide variety of software here, although educational, entertainment, and lifestyle programs are the most common.

### www.pdfstore.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

The **PDF Store** specializes in software for creating and working with Portable Document Format files. The site sells shareware and commercial software for immediate download. The selection includes PDF conversion, management, printing, and development software—a convenient, focused selection.

### soft4u.com

free shipping on orders over $300 • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Soft4U** specializes in software for businesses, resellers, schools, and government offices. The company offers same-day shipping on most software. Special prices are available for staff and students at academic institutions.

### www.softwarebuyline.com

smooth navigation

**Software BuyLine** has a massive selection of software titles for Windows, Mac OS, and Linux. The site sells Windows CE and Palm applications, too. Prices here are usually among the best. You'll also get easy access to product rebate information.

### softwareshowcase.com

**Software Showcase** provides academic discounts on software, hardware, and computer books. To qualify for educational pricing, you must be an employee or student at an accredited educational institution.

### softwarespectrum.com

Offering "smart solutions for smart companies," **Software Spectrum's** online catalog serves up 80,000 titles. Aimed at large and small businesses, the site provides frequent shoppers with purchasing-pattern reports, plus pricing and invoicing in a choice of currencies.

### tucows.com

mirror sites speed downloads • smooth navigation

Bovine bliss: **Tucows** is an incredible archive of freeware and shareware. The category list and reviews make it easy to find the software you're seeking. In the eBarn area, you can pay for, register, and download commercial software.

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

### www.americancentury.com

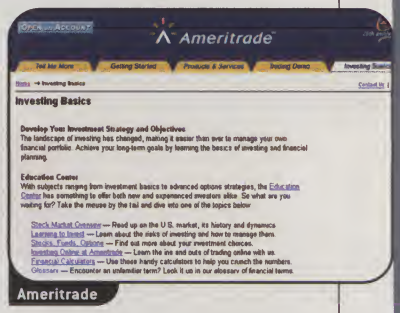
stock, bond, and option trading • retirement services • smooth navigation

Whether you are a conservative, moderate, or aggressive investor, **American Century** has a fund targeted to your needs.

### ameritrade.com

sophisticated tools for options traders • smooth navigation

Offering a variety of IRAs, mutual funds, and other investment services, **Ameritrade** features low commissions for Internet, phone, and broker-assisted investing. Clients can receive timely information about their portfolios.




## TIPS for Online Mortgage Shopping

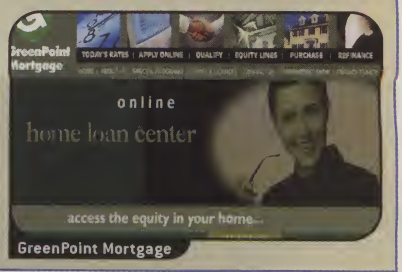
• The Web allows you to shop for a mortgage on your own terms. You can often get basic information about loan rates and options without sharing your personal information. If you do choose to share your name, address, and phone number, however, you can expect to be contacted by a lender.

• Use your Web browser to shop for the best interest rates. Many mortgage sites—such as E-Loan ***(www.eloan.com)***, GreenPoint Mortgage ***(www.greenpointdirect.com)***, Quicken Loans ***(www.quickenloans.quicken.com)***, and MortgageStart.com—list their rates on their Web sites, updated daily. Or get aggregate information from MortgageQuotes.com, which provides rates from 1,400 lenders.

• The process of choosing and obtaining financing can be more than a little daunting. Mortgage101.com is an informative Web site that offers hundreds of plain-English explanations and definitions. More than a dozen calculators will help you figure how much house you can afford, whether it's time to refinance, and what tax benefits you get when you buy a home.

• Some sites will prequalify you for a home loan, but don't go this route until you've settled on a lender. Prequalification means the lender will run a credit check. Unnecessary credit checks can make getting a loan more difficult later.

• Although you may be used to buying software and books online, getting a mortgage is a much more intricate process. The Web is a great tool for research, but don't rule out signing the deal with a local mortgage broker. In complex financial matters, sometimes there is no substitute for a face-to-face talk.

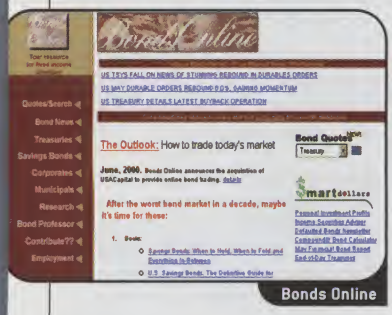


SITE REVIEWS

## bondsonline.com

👍 daily bond-market commentary
• daily pricing of U.S. Treasury securities

**Bonds Online** offers market information about tax-free municipal bonds, Treasury bonds, funds, and brokers. You can also buy software that will calculate the prices and yields of your bonds.


Bonds Online
The Outlook: How to trade today's market
Bond Quotes
Treasury
SmartDollars
After the worst bond market in a decade, maybe it's time for these:

## clearstation.com

👍 discussions about stocks and trading strategies • track an unlimited number of portfolios • smooth navigation

**ClearStation** is a financial-advisory Web site that helps investors make decisions by identifying and interpreting stock trends.

## datek.com

👍 free real-time quotes • after-hours trading • smooth navigation

Investors can build their own portfolios at **Datek,** using online resources to make educated decisions. The commission for most online trades is $9.99.

DATEK ONLINE
Streaming Market Data
Trade Bulletin Board Stocks at Datek Online
Money Magazine, Forbes, and TheStreet.com Agree · Top Honors
Why Settle for Delayed Quotes? Register Now for Datek Online's Streamed!
Year-to-Date: $825,128.99 In Order Flow Payments Rebated to Datek Customers
Why Stop Trading When the Traditional
Market Summary
Datek

## www.edgar-online.com

👍 search the SEC database
• historical data dating back to 1994
• smooth navigation

For up-to-date financial reports on companies, **Edgar Online** is a great place to start. Premium subscribers enjoy real-time SEC filings, insider transaction filings, and custom company watch lists.

## etrade.com

👍 community area offers discussion groups and online events

**ETrade** investors can learn about companies, then build and manage their own stock portfolios. Amenities include free streaming NASDAQ Level II quotes, IPO allocations, and real-time updates.

## hoovers.com

👍 4,000 company profiles • upcoming IPOs featured • smooth navigation

**Hoover's Online** offers countless resources for financial research. Free tools include daily financial headlines and the Stock Screener.

## ino.com

👍 option chains • free end-of-the-day updates by e-mail • smooth navigation

Devoted to futures and option trades, **Ino.com** offers a comprehensive site that includes daily financial headlines, quotes and charts, and lively forums.

## kiplinger.com

👍 forums let users ask questions and discuss financial topics • financial software and videos • smooth navigation

**Kiplinger.com** contains a vast array of financial information. Departments include taxes, insurance, investments, and home. Each area includes several articles and columns.

## quicken.com/small_business

👍 buy accounting software, stamps, and checks • smooth navigation

The **Quicken** site offers copious information for small-business owners. You'll find insightful articles on accounting, payroll, and taxes. Check the benefits and retirement page to learn how to choose an IRA, create a benefits policy, or provide health insurance.

## schwab.com

👍 24-hour customer service
• *services for high-volume traders*

Online investors can get help planning for college, retirement, or a rainy day at **Charles Schwab.** This site offers myriad investing options, as well as research and planning services.

## stockmaster.com

👍 create custom investment profiles
• message boards for investment discussions • smooth navigation

**StockMaster** will tell you the trading price and details of any stock or investment fund, providing instant graphs of that stock's activity. A subscription service provides access to Baseline Company Profiles of more than 7,000 companies.

## wallstreetcity.com

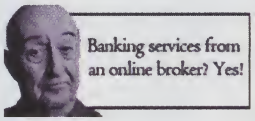
👍 intuitive explanations of stock trends • free 30-day trial

**Wall Street City's** free services include quotes and graphs, real-time market commentary, and analyst reviews. Paying a monthly subscription fee adds access to historical quotes and portfolio monitoring.

## waterhouse.com

👍 offers checking accounts with electronic bill payment

At **TD Waterhouse's** Web site, the money-minded will find brokerage, banking, and mutual-fund services. Waterhouse freely makes available company news, reports, and charts to investors with inquiring minds. Online stock trading costs a flat $12 per transaction.




## windowonwallstreet.com

**WindowOnWallStreet.com** offers professional-level stock trading services, including real-time quotes, dynamically updated charts, and online trades. Other features include real-time option chains, as well as streaming quotes and news. The service costs $79.95 per month and requires you to install a desktop Internet client.

## wingspanbank.com

👍 smooth navigation

One of the new breed of Internet banks, **WingspanBank.com** offers a full range of banking, loan, brokerage, and insurance services. Convenient banking options include interest-bearing checking accounts with direct deposit, as well as online bill-payment services.

## www.wsrn.com

👍 stock screener • links to publications on economy, equity, and markets

**Wall Street Research Net** offers thousands of links to help professional and private investors perform research on companies and mutual funds, as well as locate important economic data. Brokerage reports and historical stock-price data are available for a fee.

## ONLINE AUCTIONS

SITE REVIEWS

### auctions.cnet.com

👍 well-defined categories make items easy to locate • smooth navigation

At **CNET Auctions,** a site dedicated to computer-product auctions, you can bid on the hardware and software listed, or put any computer items you'd like to sell on the block. Sellers range from individuals to well-known companies.

### auctions.com

👍 offers auction types unavailable elsewhere • smooth navigation
👎 diverse category listings can be hit-or-miss

At **Auctions.com,** you'll find 6,000 categories of user-to-user auctions. The computer-auction listings offer a respectable quantity of PC hardware and software. You pay no fee to list items for sale, but the site takes a small percentage if your items sell.

### auctions.goto.com

👍 trend-watch and message boards • smooth navigation

**GoTo Auctions** puts at your disposal a cross-auction search engine that hunts for items in 14 categories.

### auctions.yahoo.com

👍 no charge to list items for sale • large selection of antiques and collectibles • smooth navigation

**Yahoo's** user-to-user auction site offers hundreds of thousands of items in diverse categories ranging from computer hardware to motorcycles. Collector clubs, message boards, and live chat let sellers and buyers talk, ask questions, and trade items.

### auctions.zdnet.com

👍 the Auction Agent will notify you when a new auction meets your criteria • smooth navigation

The auction site of **ZDNet,** *Computer Shopper's* parent company, offers primarily computer hardware and software. Categories include consumer electronics, gaming, domains, and services. You'll find user-to-user auctions, as well as new and used items offered by well-known businesses.

### bid.com

The **Bid.com** business-to-user equipment auction site offers desktop and notebook computers, monitors, upgrades, cameras, and home electronics. Equipment may be new or refurbished.

### ebay.com

Best Site winner this month. See below.

### ewanted.com

👍 smooth navigation
👎 unique system, but the selection of "items wanted" is small compared to the number of products for sale on traditional auction sites

"Turning auctions upside down" is the goal of **eWanted.** The site allows potential buyers to list the items they're looking for. Sellers can submit offers, bidding down the price to earn the business. Categories include computer equipment, antiques, baby items, and real estate.

### haggle.com

👍 smooth navigation

**Haggle.com** is a user-to-user auction site that has nearly 40 computer-related categories, plus "other stuff" auctions ranging from musical instruments to automobiles. Sellers will appreciate the free basic listings.

### itrack.com

👍 auction news area

Simple to use, **iTrack.com** searches online auctions so you don't have to. Free memberships allow you to select five patterns (combinations of an auction site and an item) at a given time; for $25 per year, you can search 10 patterns at a time; and for $50, 20 patterns at a time. You can choose from 14 auction sites.

### tradeout.com

👍 smooth navigation

**TradeOut.com** describes itself as a "business-to-business exchange for excess inventory and idle assets." It helps companies buy and sell surplus goods—from computers to car parts to construction supplies. Most items are sold at auction, but others are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

### ubid.com

👍 smooth navigation

**UBid's** business-to-user auction house offers computers, electronics, housewares, sports items, jewelry, and gifts. If you can't wait several days to learn if you've won, click on the Auctions Closing This Hour link.

## SMALL-BUSINESS RESOURCES

### atyouroffice.com

👍 free delivery on all orders more than $25 • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

The impressive **AtYourOffice.com** site offers everything for the office, from the essential to the mundane—30,000 products in all. You can limit searches to products that are generic brands, eco-friendly, or manufactured by women- or minority-owned businesses.

### businessplans.org

👍 links to franchise information, public-relations resources, market analysis, and other sites

The **Center for Business Planning** offers a library of real business plans that you can download and review offline, an automated tool that can evaluate your marketing strategy, and a massive collection of links of interest to anyone starting a business.

### consultlink.com

👍 consultant reference checks available • smooth navigation

**ConsultLink** is a directory service that helps businesses find contractors and independent consultants in a wide variety of high-tech fields, such as technology strategy, programming, and techni-

### ebay.com

Computer Shopper Best Site Award September 2000

**E**Bay is the Internet's most popular auction site, and for good reason. The sheer volume of auctions—half a million begin every day—means there is always something of interest for sale, no matter what your interests.

Well-executed special features are one reason eBay transcends other user-to-user auction sites. For instance, My eBay has a central tool you can use to track your buying and selling activity, monitor interesting auctions, and access favorite product categories. The Gallery lets you shop by looking at pictures rather than reading countless product descriptions.

The site's community tools make eBay more than just a place to buy computer parts and comic books. The Feedback Forum lets you verify a seller's transaction history before you place a bid, and the message boards facilitate chats with other users between shopping sprees.

EBay bolsters its site with unique services for auction buyers and sellers. All purchases are insured up to $200 through eBay's SafeHarbor insurance program. And the site's new Billpoint service allows even occasional sellers to accept credit-card and electronic-check payments.

**EBAY**

**Main focus:** User-to-user auctions of every imaginable object in 4,300 categories

**Number of products offered:** About 4 million items on any given day

**Areas of development:** Partnerships with Wells Fargo to ease person-to-person credit-card transactions, and E-Stamp to sell postage online

cal writing. ConsultLink charges a fee to access each profile. A flat-fee option allows unlimited profile views.

## directdeposit.com

Since 1991, **National Payment Corp.** has been providing direct-deposit services for small and medium-size businesses. Using a secure Web browser, you can submit payroll for direct deposit to your employees' bank accounts. The site can exchange data with more than two dozen accounting programs.

## efax.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

The **eFax.com** site gives you a personal fax and voice-mail number and delivers incoming messages by e-mail. The free basic service allows you to receive an unlimited number of faxes. For a monthly fee, eFax Plus lets you send faxes and convert incoming faxes to text.

## e-stamp.com

you don't have to be online to print postage
buying postage requires special hardware

**E-Stamp** lets you buy postage over the Internet, then print that postage on your printer. You can use E-Stamp to send first-class, Priority Mail, Express Mail, and parcel-post items. The site sells envelopes, labels, postage scales, and other mailing supplies.

## www.fedworld.gov/taxsear.htm

smooth navigation • order federal tax information on CD-ROM

At **FedWorld** you'll find downloadable tax forms for tax years 1992 through 1999 and instructions on filling them out, as well as IRS publications, tax tables, and tax regulations.

## iprint.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

With the help of **iPrint.com,** creating personalized items for business is a snap. Place your mark on stationery, rubber stamps, business cards, and sticky notepads, or create your own promotional items like key chains, T-shirts, and golf balls.

## iship.com

The **iShip** tracking tool is a one-stop spot for seeing the status of shipments sent with any major carrier. The QuickPrice function offers cost comparisons of the U.S. Postal Service, UPS, FedEx, and Airborne Express.

## officebase.com

smooth navigation
orders may take three weeks to fill

From office machines to snacks, this office-supply store sells just about anything you could need in the workplace. **Office Base** is simple but effective, making it easy to find products.

## onlinepayroll.com

**Online Business Services** will help any business become more efficient and receive more than 80 financial reports. Online Payroll can receive payroll information by telephone, fax, modem, or direct link with your electronic time clock.

## paycheckcity.com

**Paycheck City** provides Web-based calculators to verify the accuracy of payroll checks. Employers can use the site to complete W-4 forms, and employees can verify what they should be paying in federal, state, and Social Security taxes.

## www.pointofsale.com

**Pointofsale.com** specializes in retail essentials, including point-of-sale software and hardware, bar-code scanners, *magnetic-stripe readers,* and receipt printers. FAQs answer basic questions about bar codes, POS systems, and cash drawers.

SITE REVIEWS

## smartship.com

helps find your nearest package drop-off site
limited information about smaller carriers

**SmartShip** makes it easy to select the right carrier for your shipments. Enter the weight and other details about your package, and the site will help you choose the best major carrier, whether your priority is speed or cost.

## www.ssa.gov

smooth navigation

The **Social Security Administration's** site can make the necessary task of paying Social Security understandable to small-business owners. The Guide for Employers offers detailed help with employer wage-filing responsibilities. The FAQ answers questions about documentation and filing deadlines.

## stamps.com

no special hardware required
must be online to print postage

**Stamps.com** lets customers buy postage online and print it using an inkjet or laser printer. You can send items first-class, Priority, and Express Mail. Delivery confirmation and certified mail are also available.

## usa.net

**USA.net** can set up a Web post office for your business, letting you and your employees have instant access to e-mail from any Web browser. The long list of standard and premium features includes necessities such as spell-checking and language translation.

## www.virtualpayroll.com

**Virtual Payroll** simplifies the cycle of payroll and taxes for small businesses. Through this secure site, company and employee information is entered to set up initial payroll accounts; with periodic updates, employees are paid by direct deposit within 48 hours.

## webex.com

offers Web-based *business* collaboration
requires a special plug-in

**WebEx** is an online collaboration system that hosts thousands of daily meetings. Share documents and applications with colleagues who have your meeting-room password and the WebEx plug-in. Free "virtual offices" offer personalized conference rooms with online calendar, address-book, document-storage, and directory tools.

# CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

## consumer-direct.com

smooth navigation

Shopping for something simple, such as a surge protector? Or complicated, like C-Band satellite receivers? Either way, **Consumer Direct Warehouse** provides a selection of brands and styles to explore.

## crutchfield.com

Best Site winner this month. See p. 224.

## 800.com

review your complete order history • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

The **800.com** site specializes in video and audio systems, personal electronics, video games, and movies. See side-by-side comparisons of products. The selection includes digital cameras, televisions, and home and car stereos.

## etown.com

smooth navigation
shipping costs and return policies can vary among etown.com partners

Consumer electronics is the focus at **etown.com,** a site offering gadgets such as cordless phones and flat-screen televisions. The site also serves up consumer-electronics news, informative features, and a knowledge bank that explains how to buy, use, and troubleshoot equipment.

# SITE REVIEWS

## giantsavings.com

smooth navigation

**GiantSavings.com** offers a wide selection of home electronics, ranging from DVD players to PDAs.

## globe-mart.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

**Global Mart's** electronics area offers audio/video components, flat-panel displays, digital cameras, and multifunction printers. The selection also includes handheld PCs and uninterruptible power supplies.

## hifi.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Hifi.com** offers home-audio and home-theater products for everyone from the budget-minded to the most sophisticated audiophile. You get free shipping and a no-questions-asked 45-day return policy on most products.

## igo.com

real-time online support • smooth navigation • easy ordering

The **iGo** site sells electronic necessities for folks on the go, including PDAs, cellular phones, and carrying cases. The extensive catalog of add-ons includes antennae, batteries, and other accessories for users of mobile digital devices.

## servicemerchandise.com

smooth navigation • good return policy

many items only available for in-store pickup

In business for nearly 40 years, **Service Merchandise** is a catalog showroom offering electronics, health and exercise equipment, toys, travel items, and jewelry. The electronics area of its Web site sells home-office products, video equipment, sound systems, and cameras.

## crutchfield.com

Computer Shopper Best Site Award September 2000

In business for 26 years, **Crutchfield** assembles an impressive catalog of audio and video products for your home and car. The information its site provides is just as impressive. Order-response time is also top-notch: Two days after we placed an order, a Federal Express truck arrived with the goods. Inexpensive two-day shipping is standard for most orders.

Shopping for a car stereo? The site's Vehicle Selector will steer you to CD players, cassette receivers, MiniDisc players, and speakers designed to fit your car. Crutchfield also sells tools and accessories for installing car-stereo components and building speaker boxes. The selection of products for the home is also superb, ranging from digital home-theater systems to phonographs.

The extensive Info Center offers glossaries, guides to choosing components, answers to frequently asked questions, and installation tips. Expert advice is also available via a toll-free phone number—before you order and for the lifetime of the purchase. The company's return policy provides for an exchange or full refund for any reason within 30 days—Crutchfield even pays for return shipping.

| CRUTCHFIELD CORP. |
|---|
| **Main focus:** Audio and video products for home and car |
| **Additional categories:** Automobile accessories and security products |
| **Number of products offered:** 5,000 |
| **Areas of development:** Currently publishing new guide to home theater and multiroom audio/video installation; planned improvements include interactive online customer service and community features to demonstrate how buyers use their gear. |

## va.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**ValueAmerica** offers an array of home-entertainment products, including audio and video equipment, cameras, and communications products. Plus, you'll find movies, games, and other media. Extended service plans are available, and online shoppers enjoy free shipping.

## theweb-shop.com

easy ordering

Shop **The Web Shop Superstore** for a wide variety of home-electronics offerings, including computers, home-office equipment, cameras, camcorders, and home and car audio.

# CAMERAS

## abbeycamera.com

links to manufacturer sites • smooth navigation • good return policy

**Abbey Camera's** catalog of more than 10,000 cameras and accessory items will impress even veteran photographers. The options range from 35mm cameras to medium- and large-format models, darkroom supplies, and professional gear.

## keh.com

message board offers technical advice • smooth navigation • good return policy

In business for 20 years, **KEH Camera Brokers** peddles new items as well as good-condition used equipment. The automated buying service gives an immediate quote on what KEH will pay for your used equipment.

## www.normancamera.com

good return policy

From point-and-shoot models to high-tech digital cameras, you're likely to find it in **Norman Camera's** catalog. See a large selection of film scanners, video cameras, and accessories.

## photoalley.com

tips and how-to articles • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

From Agfa to Yashica, if it has a lens, it's at **Photo Alley.** This site features a catalog of more than 11,000 products, ranging from cameras and gadget bags to camcorders and even binoculars.

## ritzcamera.com

free shipping on orders more than $50 • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

In addition to offering cameras and accessories, **Ritz Camera** also sells photo albums and frames. Shoppers with a retail location nearby can see their photos online in one hour, then order reprints or merchandise with a photo on it.

# BOOKS AND MUSIC

## www.alibris.com

Book Hound tool will search for a book for a month and e-mail you • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Alibris** offers one-stop searching and browsing of hundreds of independent booksellers around the globe. You don't have to be a book collector to appreciate the massive selection in categories from romance to computers.

## amazon.com

buy and sell rare and unusual items in person-to-person auctions • discussion boards and member Web pages • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Amazon.com's** catalog of books, CDs, and videos is nothing short of gargan-

SITE REVIEWS

tuan. Speedy searches and insightful recommendations make it easy to find what you're looking for, even if you don't know for sure what that is.

## audible.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

**Audible** delivers the next generation of books on tape. Buy and download audio programs, such as *The Wall Street Journal* or best-selling books. Then listen to the programs on your PC or a portable player.

## bn.com

music, DVDs, videos, posters, software, and magazines available • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

With millions of titles in its catalog, **Barnes & Noble's** site is a book lover's dream. If the book you want is out of print, don't despair: It might be available through Barnes & Noble's association with used-book sellers across the country.

## bookfinder.com

mailing list for booksellers

**BookFinder** is a search engine that scans the databases of 15,000 booksellers to find new, used, rare, and out-of-print books. It's a quick way to search many independent bookstores at once for hard-to-find titles.

## borders.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy • best-sellers and forthcoming books sold for 50 percent off list price

If you've ever gotten lost in one of **Borders'** enormous retail stores, you'll appreciate this vast site. It offers a selection of 10 million books, CDs, and videos. Check out the In the News listings to find today's topical books.

## cdnow.com

create custom CDs • site available in seven languages • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**CDnow** is a megasite offering an extensive catalog of titles on vinyl, cassette, and CD. RealAudio sound clips and reviews are available for many of the discs. The Album Advisor learns your musical tastes and suggests other bands you'll enjoy.

## cdworld.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • read reviews of software and books, and write your own

**CDworld** sells software, video games, movies, and music—more than half a million items in all. You can get movies on videotape, DVD, laserdisc, or movie CD. Video-game choices include Dreamcast, Nintendo, and PlayStation, as well as PC and Mac titles.

## checkout.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**The Checkout Entertainment Network** offers music, movies, and video games, wrapped up in an entertaining shopping experience. The site serves up featured artists, quizzes, trivia, and lists of top sellers. You'll find plenty of detail about each item, complete with an editor's review, ratings, and technical details.

## codysbooks.com

world's largest selection of Passover books and merchandise • 20 to 30 percent discounts on best-sellers

An independent bookstore based in Berkeley, Calif., **Cody's Books** offers a searchable catalog of its 150,000 in-stock titles. In addition, the store can order any in-print book, plus books published in some other countries. The site offers thoughtful recommendations and reading lists.

## emusic.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering

***EMusic.com*** offers downloadable MP3 music. You can purchase an individual song, usually for 99 cents, or download an entire album for about $9.

## www.express.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Express.com** sells DVD movies, music, video games, and electronics. You'll find plenty of information about each title, and preordering hot releases is a breeze. The Auction area offers collectible goodies from the worlds of television, film, and sports, such as movie props and autographed scripts.

## ibooks.com

create a personal digital bookshelf for quick access • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Ibooks.com** offers more than 1,000 digital books on technical topics such as programming, databases, and multimedia. Books can be read online from any Web browser, or printed for offline perusal.

## ktel.com

online radio station • $6 CDs in the bargain bin • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

Six departments at **K-Tel** offer a variety of merchandise with an emphasis on entertainment. At the custom CD store, shoppers can design their own compilation discs. The music store offers soundtracks and box sets of popular favorites.

## muzicdepot.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

From electronica to jazz to gospel, **MuzicDepot.com** has just about any in-print CD or cassette you can name, as well as information about out-of-print titles. Tell the Muzic Advizor about your tastes, and it will recommend other artists you may enjoy. The site also offers movies in the DVD and VHS formats.

## powells.com

rare books • online reading group • smooth navigation • good return policy

Book lovers know **Powell's** as an independently owned megastore in Portland, Ore. You can search Powell's renowned selection of new and used books at its Web store. Browse through the staff picks and recommendation center for more great reads.

## samgoody.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

**Sam Goody** offers movies, music, and more. The "more" includes software, video games, sheet music, and related books.

## www.towerrecords.com

smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

The **Tower Records** site features a huge selection of music and videos. The search tool lets shoppers find music based on the artist, the album, or even the name of a single song. The Pulse online magazine includes reviews and interviews from pop and classical artists.

## virginmega.com

daily music news and gossip • new releases featured weekly • smooth navigation • easy ordering • good return policy

Visit **Virgin's** legendary music and video store without taking a trip to Times Square. The megastore's site offers an incredible selection of tunes, DVDs, *and videos, with thoughtful* commentary on featured items and RealAudio previews of many tracks. ▼